

Sinn Féin

WEST BELFAST INFORMATION BULLETIN

A stolen mandate

IN A BLATANTLY POLITICAL decision last week the special electoral court in Belfast ruled in favour of Joe Hendron, against all the evidence, and saving him from a humiliating exit from political life.

Responding to the court decision Gerry Adams said "Joe Hendron should resign his seat and fight a by-election. If he is to retain any integrity Mr Hendron must seek a fresh mandate. His position as MP for the West Belfast constituency is based upon a flawed mandate and not upon the free and fair vote of the local electorate.

"He was elected as a result of proven electoral abuses, as a result of sponsorship by the **Irish News**, with the aid of massive financial resources, with support from the UDA and the patronage of the British government. Yet despite all this, Joe Hendron is the MP for West Belfast only by the grace of the unionist judiciary and by the narrowest margin of only one per cent.

"The court decision was a blatantly political one. Joe Hendron and Tom Kelly were found guilty on nine counts; and other charges were ignored by the judges. These included two primary breaches — the **Irish News** adverts and the cost of an electoral survey. These expenses put the SDLP election costs at over £19,500 or three times the amount permitted by law.

"The court's

refusal to take the seat from Joe Hendron does not surprise me although even I was surprised at the court's contempt for any

notion of justice and the blatant disregard for even its own perverted sense of the law. There is no doubt that the verdict would have been much different if I had been in the dock or if Joe Hendron had been a poor person charged with some breach of social services regulations. Everyone knows that

the SDLP defence was based upon a litany of lies. The most scurrilous of these were aimed at the very people Hendron claims to

represent — the nationalist and republican people of West Belfast.

"I want to commend Maura McCrory and the others who took this issue to court. The court's refusal — by a special order — to grant them costs was a vicious example of judicial extortion and intimidation.

"I began my remarks by challenging Joe Hendron to do the decent thing by the people of West Belfast. After the court case he told BBC radio and television that if

there was an election at this time his vote would virtually double. He has everything to gain therefore from a new contest."

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— Gerry Adams



THE PRIMARY BREACHES:

Following the court decision, Maura McCrory outlined the main issues in the court case

■ Irish News advertising:

The Hendron campaign advertised in the *Irish News* to the value of £5,293. The *Irish News* however gave the SDLP discounts on this advertising of £2,793. This 'equivalent of money' contribution was not declared by the SDLP in their returns and the judges ruled in their favour in this regard.

The Hendron campaign also placed a half page ad in the *Irish News* on polling day at a cost of over £1,600 but did not declare this in their return of expenses. Tom Kelly, Hendron's election agent, claimed that this ad which showed Hendron with SDLP MPs McGrady, Mallon and Hume, was not part of the election campaign but was to promote the SDLP talks team. The judges accepted this.

In evidence to the court, *Irish News* executive Dominic Fitzpatrick admitted that advertising invoices had been compiled for the specific purpose of assisting Dr Hendron's election expense returns and that these invoices were not part of the *Irish News* actual records. The judges disregarded this.

■ Coopers and Lybrand Survey

The SDLP commissioned a major survey by Coopers and Lybrand to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Joe Hendron and to find what issues were of importance to the West Belfast electorate. This survey cost the SDLP £8,460. The SDLP did not disclose the fact that they had commissioned this survey in their return of expenses after the election. The judges ruled that this was not an election expense.

■ Daily Mirror Advertising

The Hendron campaign placed adverts in the *Daily Mirror* but

only declared a fraction of these in their return of expenses. The SDLP admitted this.

■ St Peter's Bulletin

The Hendron campaign advertised in the St Peter's Parish Bulletin but did not declare this in their return of expenses. The SDLP admitted this.

■ Election Leaflets

The Hendron campaign produced five different election leaflets but did not declare the cost of three of these in their return of expenses. The judge accepted SDLP excuses in regard to two of these, but significantly, in the case of the third, ignored this, in their judgement. The SDLP had offered no explanation for their failure to include this leaflet in their return of expenses.

■ Van Hire

The SDLP in West Belfast hired vans from McCauslands and Practical Hire, but did not include these in their return of expenses. The judges accepted SDLP explanations for one of these, but ignored the hiring of McCauslands' van in their judgement.

■ Crane Hire

The Hendron campaign hired a mechanical hoist for poster-ing in West Belfast but did not disclose this in their return of expenses. The judges accepted the SDLP explanations for this.

■ PA hire

The Hendron campaign hired public address equipment but did not disclose this in their return of expenses. The judges accepted the SDLP explanations for this.

Election agent was handed two bills, court told
Poll cost 'known'

Hendron and agent accused of 'wholesale law-breaking'

Hendron faces court charges of 'cheating' election costs

Irish News tells of SDLP ads 'deal'

Election agent agreed cost of surveys court told

Hendron was responsible for expenses, court is told

West Belfast election row flares again as...

SDLP DENIES UDA MEETINGS CLAIM

NO END IN SIGHT TO UDA WAR OF WORDS

Hendron says agent was 'inexperienced'

SDLP MP leads off court charge of 'vexatious' practice in April's election



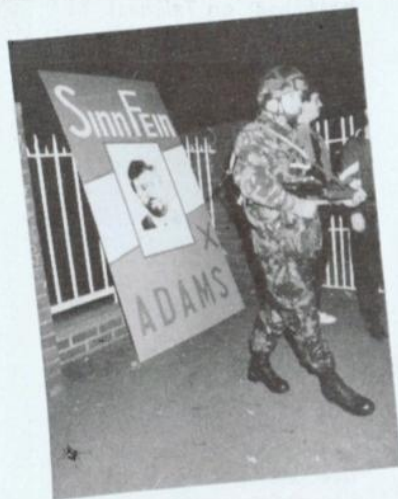
The pro-British Alliance

The SDLP campaign to take the West Belfast seat was not confined to illegal overspend and electoral malpractice. Hendron also had the backing of a wide alliance of pro-British interests.

UDA. In the run-up to the general election Hendron held a series of meetings with senior members of the UDA and in January the UDA, and their political front, the UDP, called on loyalists to back Hendron.



● Hendron's electoral allies — UDA death squads



BRITISH ARMY. The British army engaged in a campaign of intimidation and terror against the Sinn Féin election workers. Young people were prevented from putting up Sinn Féin posters, others were threatened and abused. Two election workers in the Lenadoon area were accosted by British paratroopers and threatened at gunpoint that they would be shot.

BRITISH GOVERNMENT. The British government exerted extreme pressure on other political parties, including the unionists and the Workers' Party, to stand down and allow Hendron a free run against Sinn Féin.

MEDIA. The media ran a campaign of support for Hendron which took the form of constant attacks on Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams. This ranged from unsubstantiated allegations of vote stealing in the *Sunday World* to persistent editorial attacks on Sinn Féin in the *Irish News*. A survey of *Irish News* editorials over a 12-month period showed a pattern of editorial attacks on Sinn Féin with not one editorial critical of SDLP policies.

RUC. Throughout the election campaign the RUC made persistent attempts to disrupt the work of Sinn Féin. On 4 February last year a member of the RUC entered the Sinn Féin advice centre and killed three people including Pat McBride, a key election worker in the Lower Falls area. RUC harassment of Sinn Féin members was relentless and a sustained attempt was made to disrupt the Sinn Féin election machine. On polling day:

- Three Sinn Féin election offices in West Belfast were raided;
- Sinn Féin area organisers were arrested and held for several hours;
- Sinn Féin election workers were constantly stopped and searched;
- The Vere Foster polling station, where polling for Gerry Adams was intense, was closed for several hours by the RUC.

Blaming the people

But in addition to the illegal practices, the defence mounted by the SDLP in the case, during which they vilified the West Belfast community, must raise further questions about the suitability of Dr Hendron to represent this area.

The SDLP defence case was patently dishonest.

For example Hendron claimed that he was left to fight the West Belfast seat unaided when every journalist in Ireland had been told by the SDLP that their party was targeting the West Belfast seat and that this was the most important contest in the election. That the SDLP poured enormous resources into Hendron's campaign is beyond dispute. Part of this assistance was the transfer of electoral whizz kid Tom Kelly to West Belfast. Hendron claimed that Kelly was his election agent because no one else would take the job, an incredible slur on his own party colleagues in West Belfast and in itself a measure of Hendron's desperation. Alex Attwood, an SDLP councillor refused to act as Hendron's campaign manager or election agent because, he claimed, he was afraid he would be intimidated. A blatant lie since Alex Attwood regularly appears on TV

screens in West Belfast speaking on behalf of the SDLP.

To explain away electoral abuses Hendron claimed that Kelly was an inexperienced novice and was chosen, in the words of the SDLP's barrister because 'Beggars can't be choosers'. Yet Kelly is one of the most experienced activists the SDLP has. He has been vice-chairperson of the SDLP and chairperson of their organisation committee. He has served on the party's executive and was in charge of the training of SDLP members in election techniques. He received training in the United States and worked with Séamus Mallon in his election campaign. Any suggestion that he is inexperienced is patently untrue and an attempt to explain away deliberate malpractice.

Despite the dishonesty of these statements perhaps the most infuriating element of Hendron's defence was his attack on the West Belfast community itself. In court he and his legal representatives have described West Belfast as being rampant with 'terrorism' and 'intimidation' and that proper election conditions do not apply in this area. In doing so Hendron was pandering to a bigoted view of this area and blaming his own misbehaviour on the people of the area whose interests he claims to serve. This scandalous behaviour alone calls into question his suitability to represent this area.



● Intimidation and terror were rampant in West Belfast during the election, but not in the way Joe Hendron portrayed it

What they said.....

*After hearing what has emerged in court and the statements that have been made against the ordinary people of West Belfast, we think that Dr Hendron's fitness to be MP for the constituency must be called into question. — **Andersonstown News** editorial, 12 December '92.*

*I am not unaware of the survey's final price.— **Tom Kelly, Hendron's election agent, 5 December '92 at election court hearing.***

*Mr Kelly negotiated the fee and was personally handed two bills. — **Ms Catherine Toner, Coopers & Lybrand, three days later at election court hearing.***

*Yes, he was present — I accept that. — **Joe Hendron, confirming he met senior loyalist Gary McMichael, on Talkback, BBC radio Thursday, 17 September 1992.***

*Thousands of loyalists supported Dr Hendron. The UDA has no problem with Dr Hendron representing West Belfast. — **UDA Inner Council statement following the Belfast West election result.***

*I'm glad Joe Hendron has won. — **Lord Gerry Fitt.***

*It's the best news I've heard in six and a half years. — **Former British NIO Minister Richard Needham after Hendron's election 'victory'.***

*My first comments are to pay tribute to Loré Justice Kelly and Mr Justice Higgins. — **Joe Hendron***

*Two judges have decided that I am the MP for West Belfast. — **Joe Hendron***

*Usually the people decide who their MP is. — **Gerry Adams***